

Class: NT 615 Exegetical

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Step 6

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, **To the church of the Thessalonians** in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word **in much affliction**, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in **Macedonia and in Achaia**. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, **and how you turned to God from idols** to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

6.1 list features of your text that you suspect might be clarified by a greater knowledge of Jewish or Greco- Roman history and culture.

- The city of Thessalonica
- Much affliction
- Macedonia and Achaia
- Turn to God from Idols

6.2 choose one of these and, using the bibliography in Duvall and Hayes (pp. 120-134), explore the cultural background a little further and explain how this study may aid in an understanding of the cultural and milieu of the author.

The Apostle addressed the church by their geographical location.

Thessalonica was founded in 315 BC by Cassander, King of Macedonia and a former general of Alexander the great. He named the city after his wife, Thessalonike, a daughter of Phillip 11 and a half-sister of Alexander. The site possessed a fine natural harbor, and its placement on key north-south trade routes was near the Macedonian capital of Pella. It became Macedonia's window to the world. Macedonia was so wealthy that when the Roman senator and general Aemillus Paullus conquered it in 168 BC, he added 300 million sesterii to the coffers of Rome. (An ancient Roman coin). The Egnatia, an important roman arterial road, brought further commercial importance to the city.

Politically the city was governed by officials called politarchs.

Religiously the city reflected a cosmopolitan orientation. The traditional Greco-Roman pantheon and various foreign cults are attested in inscriptions found. Egyptians' cults were particularly prominent, with worshippers of Isis, Osiris, and Serapis a syncretized deity. **ESV Archaeology Study Bible, Introduction to first Thessalonians, Wheaton, Illinois. Crossway publishers, 2017**

Thessalonica, a city at the crossroads. From AD 44 it served as the provincial capital of Macedonia. It was the stopping point along the Via Egnatia, the Roman road from Byzantium (Istanbul) westward, eventually terminating at the embarking point for travel by sea to Italy and Rome. Thessalonians Jews had imperial permission to acquire land, erect synagogues, conduct religious worship and raise funds to send to Jerusalem. They met on the Sabbath.

The Thessalonian pagan religion existed on two levels, civic and domestic. To be a good citizen meant to pay respect to the patron deities. This included participation in feasts, sacrifices, games and other public events, there were household shrines. And banquets to the gods. **Gary, S. Shogren., and Clinton, E. Arnold, gen. ed. Exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan Zondervan publishing, 2012. P.18-19.**

In 1. Thessalonians Paul's language almost certainly would have been interpreted as an assault on the imperial order, whether he intended it to read that way or not. On four different occasions, Paul speaks of the impending coming of Jesus, using a term, *parousia*, commonly associated with the visit of the emperor or other royal dignitary, in the context that describes Jesus as Lord seventeen times and Son of God, who brings salvation, this language is unguarded, to say the least. Even more troublesome from the Roman point of view is Paul's teaching that the coming of Jesus will mean destruction for all those boastings of peace and safety. This is a challenge to Augustus and his successors. **Moyer, B. Hubbard. Christianity in the Greco- Roman World. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic. 2010. P.150-151.**

6.3 The background data's significance helps the student to understand why the Church at Thessalonica would have the affliction they were having. The affliction came from a variety of sources. Christianity's Gospel message was new and appeared as a threat to the religious and political leaders. The Christians would not observe the Sabbath, and maybe they were losing some of their membership to this new religion. They considered them to be worshipping another god named Jesus, and they would not make sacrifices to the pagan gods. The pagan communities were losing members because the saints turned from idols to serve the true and living God. To the Romans, they were worshipping another King. They were also becoming famous for their faith.